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The Barriers of National Pride

The greatest obstacle to an individual's, or a community's total submission to God, is national pride – even if that pride has been built up in the name of religion. The message of humility and total acquiescence to the divine will, which is the bedrock of true religion, passes with extreme difficulty through the barriers which national consciousness is forever erecting. If people are reluctant to accept pure, unadulterated, religion, it is precisely because it places before them objectives which seem inconsistent with rabid nationalism.

It appears such a challenge to their worldly honour and status, that they oppose it with all their might. But such opponents of religion would do well to mark the words of the Quran:

“Follow then the right path as you are bidden, together with those -who have repented with you, and do not transgress. He is aware of what you do.

And put no trust in the wrong doers, lest you get touched by the fire. You have no protectors besides' Allah. Then you will not be helped” (11:112-13).

Even the making of any compromise is a very dangerous course to adopt in view of the punishments of the afterlife:

“They sought to entice you from Our revelations, hoping that you might invent something else in Our name, and thus become their trusted friend. Indeed had we not strengthened your faith you might have made some compromise with them, and thus tasted a punishment in this life and in the next. Then you should have found none to protect you (from Our wrath)” (17:75).

Adam is the father of all past, present and future men. A life lived in accordance with reality ought. Therefore to be one of kindness to others, as to one's own brothers and sisters.

Walk Upon the Earth Modestly

“The faithful servants of God are they who walk upon the earth modestly and, when the foolish ones address them, answer: Peace.” (Quran, 25:63)

What an excellent formula the Quran offers for good human relationships and social stability. Our walking “modestly” ensures that we do not, either physically or mentally, ruffle the sensibilities of our fellow-men. And when we answer, “Peace” in the face of provocation by “the foolish ones,” our action surely has a calming effect upon would-be wrongdoers. But how many present-day Muslims recognise this formula and actually act upon it? Obviously, too few, considering the frequency with which riots break out on occasions which certainly do not call for any kind of violent disturbance. This is in large measure due to their dwelling unduly upon the notion that they are the chosen people of God. This causes them to feel proud and haughty, at which point their attachment to their religion is reduced to mere lip-service. It exists for them in form but not in spirit, for when they make reference to their religion only in order to display their superiority over others, their entire moral code becomes distorted. Wrong thinking about their religion, far from inspiring virtuous conduct, causes a moral decline to set in.

They may hold their heads high when they make it known that they are the upholders of the purest and most original form of monotheism. But they do their faith a great disservice when they persist in revering human personalities instead of God Almighty. They take a pride in saying that Islam teaches total equality, but, ironically, continue to discriminate between individuals, allowing themselves to be influenced by purely material considerations. They are the first to make public capital out of Islam’s exhortations to do good and shun evil, but in private they pay little heed to these precepts. If anyone dares to point out these contradictions, they immediately turn hostile.

The greatest paradox is that they pride themselves on the sublime character of their Prophet, in particular, his refusal to be provoked, while they themselves flare up over trivialities, even asking why they should not react in the face of provocation.

Taking On God's Own Dye

Are they seeking a religion other than God's, when all creatures in heaven and on earth have submitted to Him, willingly or by compulsion? To Him they shall all return," (Quran, 3:83).

This is what Islam means: submission to God. The Quran makes it clear that submission to God is the only religion for man and the universe. That is the only way in which human beings will become good in the true sense of the word – to themselves, their family, their society and to all mankind.

When we look at the universe around us, we see that everything – from tiny atoms to enormous galaxies – behaves with such perfection as to be totally predictable. Likewise when man obeys God's laws, as the universe obeys the laws of nature, he becomes not only predictable in his actions, but perfect in nature.

Islam, therefore, causes one to live in harmony with nature, with a proper appreciation of reality. To live in accordance with reality is to acknowledge the greatness of God and to show gratitude for the favours He bestows upon mankind, the greatest of which is the creation of man. Since all things and all beings are God's creatures, man should focus his entire attention upon the Almighty. God is truly all powerful. None besides Him. has any real power.

A stone submerged in water does not dissolve in it. It stands apart and retains its identity. But a dye dropped into water dissolves, and shortly has no separate identity from the water. That is what man's relationship with Islam should be like. He should be fully merged with his religion so that there is not a single particle of non-religious identity left. As the Quran puts it, Islam should be entered into 'in its totality', (2:208). When an individual adopts Islam in this way, it becomes the very throb of his heart, and permeates the entire fabric of his emotions. It colours each and every one of his thoughts, moulding his intellect in proper fashion. It becomes the eyes with which he sees, and the tongue with which he speaks. It takes complete possession of him to the exclusion of all else.

If Islam remains like the stone in water, it is not Islam at all, for its position in our lives should be integral and not just supplementary. The Quran exhorts us: "Take on God's own dye. And who has better dye than God's?" (2:138).

Forgive and Forget

“The honour of the believer is greater than that of the Kabah.” (*Hadith*)

Just as all Muslims are required to show respect for the House of God, the Kabah, so are they required to show respect for other Muslims. When it comes to revering the Kabah, this is done as a straightforward religious duty. There are no complicated issues, because the Kabah raises no emotional barriers to human respect. It never, for example, arouses anger, jealousy, prejudice or any other such negative feelings in the worshipper as would be a hindrance to his being properly respectful. The Kabah, composed as it is of lifeless stones, poses no human challenge. But when it comes to showing respect for one's fellow men, the situation is very different.

Very often, sentiments, which initially were positive, turn sour because the objects of our respect behave unworthily, or display such hostility that respect seems out of the question. The many obvious shortcomings of friends and acquaintances frequently arouse feeling of distaste, if not outright ill-will. This is when sacrifice becomes a necessity. The greatest sacrifice of all is that of one's own ego – the very sacrifice which most of us are unwilling to make. But the greater the sacrifice, the greater the value of the action, and the greater God's reward. As the Prophet of Islam said, “The honour of the believer is greater than that of the Kabah.”

Bearing this in mind, we should not hesitate to bear the losses incurred through the errors or enmity of others, to suppress all prejudice in ourselves quite voluntarily, and to overcome all urges to disparage others, no matter how ill-used we may feel ourselves. Above all, we must learn to forgive and forget.

Everyone has been endowed with a conscience which favours justice and abhors cruelty and injustice. Life in accordance with reality then is one of strict justice and boundless mercy.
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Accepting the New Reality

When living faith in God degenerates into stagnant ritual, it is time to make a reappraisal of the ways into which we have fallen, for meaningless ritual can never find favour in the eyes of God. If he has sent His Prophets into the world at different points in human history, it is so that through the different forms of His religion, man should be put to the test. The differences in the religions of the successive prophets are usually explained as a matter of evolution, God's religion, it is said, was first revealed in a simple, incomplete form, which gradually developed until it reached the stage of perfection. But this explanation does not stand up to inspection, for it is made quite plain in the Quran that no evolutionary process was ever intended, and that the differing forms that God's religion has taken over the ages were designed to separate the wheat from the chaff.

"We have ordained a law and assigned a path for each of you. Had God pleased, He could have made you one nation: but it is His wish to prove you by that which He has bestowed on you, so vie with each other in good deeds" (Quran 5:48).

The change of *qiblah* (direction) of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca is explained in similar terms:

"Each one has a goal towards which he turns. Emulate one another in good works.... We decreed your former *qiblah* only in order that We might know the Apostle's true adherents and those who were to disown him. It was indeed a hard test, but not to those whom God guided" (2:143, 148).

In reality, *Shariah* is a living expression of true faith in God. But when one particular form of religion has been adhered to by successive generations, it gradually loses its soul. It becomes the trigger of mechanical obeisance, without any profound significance for the human psyche. When such religious practices are characterized by such emptiness, God feels it is time to alter the form which His religion takes. He puts an end to the old established order so that people may free themselves from conventional belief and make the conscious decision to rediscover true religious awareness. When God reveals a new religion, it becomes clear who the truly faithful are. Those who are wedded to convention will remain set in their ways, whereas those who accept the new reality will bow to the will of God.

From Strength to Strength

An Englishman by the name of John Mennons arrived in Glasgow in 1782 and proceeded to found a newspaper called the Glasgow Advertiser, later renamed the Glasgow Herald. This was no mean achievement considering that his total assets at that time consisted of a wooden printing press and £200. Today the Glasgow Herald's circulation has risen to 200,000, but there were times, while it was still a new venture, when it appeared on the verge of foundering. What saved it was John Mennon's boundless enthusiasm. No matter how adverse the circumstances, or how serious the differences between his partners and himself, he still found the grit and energy to forge ahead. Far from closing its doors, his newspaper went from strength to strength.

Having originally been printed on a fairly primitive, hand-operated press, it is now being printed on highly sophisticated automatic machines. Gone are the days of typesetting and metal infusion. Now the letters are projected on to the plates by laser beam. Printing and folding are carried out automatically, then wrapped in polythene, the batches, of newspapers are taken to the dispatch department, the whole process has been streamlined and speeded up by computerization. It is a matter of great satisfaction to both proprietors and readership that the newspaper survived long enough to benefit from all these new and improved techniques. Few are aware that it almost ceased publication before the end of the eighteenth century.

Its continuing to be published is thanks, principally, to the enthusiasm and perseverance of its founder. Indeed, no great work can be sustained and brought to perfection without these qualities. Even tasks of lesser magnitude require great keenness and consistent hard work, very often over long periods, if they are ultimately to be successful.

The Greatness of Simplicity

“Where are the people who used to come here? They were thin, as if from hunger. They had black marks on their foreheads, and their footwear was made from palm leaves.”

In the time of Caliph Muawiya, Afghanistan (Known at that time as Sijistan) was assimilated into the Islamic empire. At first Sijistan's ruler, a Turkish Raja by the name of Rutbail, who was Buddhist by faith, put up stiff resistance, but, after agreeing to pay an annual tax of 100,000 dirhams, he was granted immunity. For several years in succession he paid this tax regularly, but then one year, he refused to do so. Forces were repeatedly sent to his country, but he was obdurate. When, during the reign of Yazid ibn Abdul Malik, the Caliph's envoys went to Rutbail to demand payment of the tax, the latter asked: “Where are the people who used to come here? They were thin, as if from hunger. They had black marks on their foreheads and their footwear was made from palm leaves.” He then refused to pay the tax and, for the next quarter of a century, he lived independently of the Islamic empire.

It was clear that the simplicity of the Companions had impressed Rutbail much more than the grandeur of the Umayyads. Formerly, the Islamic envoys had been unprepossessing in appearance, but had been possessed of great inner strength.

Anyone with real strength of character has very few material needs. Such an individual places a limit on his desires, shunning the world of fame and luxury. He actually takes pleasure in being humble, unlike those with pretensions to greatness. Free of any such complexes, his decision-making is never distorted by self-interest. The goals he sets before himself are worthy and wholesome, and he is ready to make any sacrifice to achieve them.

By contrast, those who seek artificial pleasures find themselves ensnared by them and, as a result, can never achieve religious fulfillment. They can never appreciate God's truth, because their lives are so cluttered with material encumbrances. They cannot see things as they are, and, this being so, are unable to associate themselves with any proper scale of human values. Living only for themselves, they lose sight of the divine goal of existence.

The Sublimity of Spiritual Experience

God does not manifest Himself in our world. The joy, therefore, that comes from realization of His existence and faith in Him is, in consequence, abstract in nature. But, in the next world, God will manifest Himself in all His glory, and the joys which God's true servants will experience in Paradise will be a materialization of the joys they experienced in their worship in this world. According to the Quran, the paradise which believers will enter in the next world will be a "known provision" (Quran, 5:41). It will be in no way strange to them, for they will already have become acquainted with it in this world through their devotions, "God will admit them to the paradise He has made known to them," or as the Prophet put it: "The people of paradise will know their dwellings even better than anyone of you knows his dwelling in his world."

The inner states that one experiences when carrying out the will of God are not in one's own power: one cannot of one's own volition create this. Where, then, do they come from? They are the 'provision' of God without which the believing aspect of one's personality cannot survive. When the Prophet Zakaria saw this 'provision' in the person of the Virgin Mary, which enabled her to know God and to do His will, he exclaimed, "Whence this gift?" "It is from God," she answered. (Quran; 3:37).

Such states of mind are God's rewards for good deeds, provided they have been the result of our own efforts. God does not hold back His supreme blessings, He grants them to us here and now. They descend upon us as soon as we prove ourselves worthy of them.

The sublime spirituality we experience when God approves of our actions are an introduction to the Heaven that God has promised to true believers. It is like being able to savour the fragrance of paradise while yet hovering on its threshold.

Death, which may be upon us at any moment, will deprive everyone of his worldly possessions. The realist will therefore look upon life's vicissitudes as transitory and insignificant in nature. He will regard all men as God's servants, regardless of their worldly status.

A Never-Ending Event

If one's thoughts are constantly centered on God, one will repeatedly come upon new and greater aspects of His glory. Different facets of His virtues will appear time and time again, bathed in an eternal, divine light. Just as God's virtues are infinite, so is the believer's search for knowledge of God unending.

Faith is the discovery of that limitless reality – God. In space and time He is never-ending, so that discovering him is likewise a never-ending, ongoing event. That is the bedrock of true religion. A well-known scientist once reflected that if a day came and went Without his having discovered anything new in nature, he felt that that day had been wasted, for, as he said, "Observing nature is my religion." If this is the feeling of one who is absorbed in God's creation, how can one who is absorbed in the Creator Himself feel any different? Just as the scientist discovers something new in the world of creation every day, so a believer should always be making fresh discoveries about his Creator – discoveries which should strengthen him in his faith.

If one's thoughts are constantly centered on God, one will repeatedly come upon new and greater aspects of His glory. Different facets of His attributes will appear time and time again, bathed in an eternal, divine light. Just as God's attributes are infinite, so is the believer's search for knowledge of God unending.

Satisfaction of this quest for knowledge takes many forms. Sometimes it takes the form of divine states never before experienced. Sometimes it expresses itself in words of praise for the Almighty never before conceived of. Sometimes some aspect of God's wisdom – hitherto unrevealed – becomes as clear as crystal. Sometimes one simply feels unusually close to God. And sometimes one suddenly feels capable of plumbing the depths of profound and awesome truths.

If discovery of God is a never ending event, the converse is also true. Faith that does not grow is no faith at all. It is an expression rather of religious neglect – neglect of Almighty God, our Creator and Sustainer.

Putting an End to Polemics

Remember, there is no quarrel that cannot be terminated. The only condition is that one of the two parties involved in the quarrel should take positive steps to bring it to an end.

God's instruction to His Prophet to avoid becoming embroiled in polemical discussions with those he is calling to the path of God are contained in the following three verses of the chapter of the Quran entitled 'Pilgrimage':

"For every nation we have ordained a ritual which they observe. Let them not dispute with you concerning this. Call them to the path of your Lord: surely you are rightly guided. If they argue with you, say: 'Allah knows best all that you do. On the Day of Resurrection, He will judge all your disputes.'" (Quran, 22:67-69)

These verses were revealed after the Muslims were taunted by certain idolators of Mecca, who said to them: "Why is it that you partake of the flesh of those animals which you have slaughtered, while you refrain from eating carrion flesh, which after all is the flesh of animals which have been killed by God?"

When the Prophet came to Arabia, its people were not irreligious, in the generally accepted sense of the term, for they had the religion which they had constructed for themselves around the hallowed name of their forefathers, Abraham and Ishmael. This they felt was under threat from the teachings of Mohammad, may peace be upon him. For instance, according to their conventional religion, carrion-flesh was lawful, while it was prohibited in the religion taught by the Prophet, whom they accused of forsaking the path of their forefathers and forging a new path in religion.

In these verses of the Quran, the Prophet is instructed not to become entangled in controversial issues of this nature. People may come to him, seeking to involve him in superficial discussions, but he should avoid the subject and press on with his task of calling people to the path of the Lord. In calling anyone to God, one should always lay stress on the fundamental tenets of religion. Discussions relating to controversial points of dogma are to be avoided.

The words of the Quran, 'Let them not dispute with you concerning this,' being a third person imperative would seem to be addressed to those who sought to involve the Prophet in disputes, but in fact it is the Prophet and his followers who are being addressed. It is they who are to take precautions on their own part to ensure that no dispute should arise. This meaning has been clarified by numerous commentators of the Quran, one of whom, Zujjaj, writes that this form of address is used to settle a dispute between two parties. "No dispute or quarrel can be conducted unless there are two parties involved. When one party retires from the field the dispute will automatically come to an end." (*Tafseer al-Mazhari*, Vol. VI, p. 346)

Clearly, the meaning of this verse is that these two activities calling people to the path of God on the one hand, and entering into disputes on the other – cannot be combined. One who wishes to communicate the message of truth must avoid becoming involved in disputes with those to whom his message is addressed.

If an atmosphere of wrangling and dispute prevails between those who are preaching the word of God and their congregation, then the latter will be prevented from considering with an open mind the merits of what they hear. For this reason, the first responsibility of one who sets out to call mankind to the path of truth is unilaterally to end all disputes between himself and his congregation. This will require what the Quran calls “Patience and avoidance” on his part, so as to create an atmosphere conducive to objective appraisal of the message he is attempting to convey.

Remember, there is no quarrel that cannot be terminated. The only condition is that one of the two parties involved in the quarrel should take positive steps to bring it to an end.

When disposed to reject the truth, one must remember that a day will come when everyone shall have to accept truth and falsehood for what they are. One should willingly accept today what one will be forced to accept tomorrow.

An Experience 'For Hindus Only'

In an article published in the Times of India of July 12, 1987, Shobha De, a Hindu lady, recounts a discouraging experience she had on attempting to enter the famous Jagannath temple at Puri. When she reached the gate, a pujari gave her a stern look and stopped her from going in. Not understanding what was the matter, she again made as if to go in, saying, "Excuse me," to the pujari. But uttering a phrase in English only seemed to make matters worse, for the pujari promptly responded in broken English, "No enter for you!" She remained at the door in bewilderment, and when she asked why she was not being allowed to go inside, she was told it was "only for Hindus." Seeing that she was bent on entering, the pujari went inside and brought back with him a panda, who said to her, "Bahenji, why do you not understand?" But when he saw how enraged she was at this, he finally motioned to her to enter.

Shortly afterwards, a temple attendant told her that she did not look like a Hindu. The reason he gave was that she was not wearing a *bindi*. Then he asked her name, which, in some consternation, she gave him. Then an 'expert' was called. After some thought, he said, "It is a Hindu name, but it is also a western name." Commenting in her article on this experience, she said that what had shocked her was that she had been confronted with prejudice and narrow-mindedness instead of the famous Hindu tolerance." The whole sham game was reinforcing all my prejudices against the fraud of organised religion." She rounds off her article with "I suddenly felt ashamed of having been born a Hindu."

Essentially, religion is the name of a relationship between God and man. It has been the mission of all of the Prophets to show man the true nature of this relationship. "What is God?" and "What is man?" and "how can a relationship be formed between God and man?" are questions to which the Prophets have given clear answers. In this respect, none of the Prophets was ever remiss in carrying out his mission.

But a great difference between Islam and other religions soon became evident, for all other religions besides Islam took the form of organised religion. The generations who succeeded the Prophets formed religious structure of their own, and, holding them to be sacred, insisted upon adherence to them. Since the original teachings of these religions had not been preserved, there existed no criteria by which the rights and wrongs of these structures could be judged.

In this respect, Islam differs fundamentally from other religions: despite many subsequent additions, the actual book of Islam and its original teachings have been fully preserved in their pristine form. This being so, it is possible to appreciate what has come from God and the Prophet, and what has been added later.

It is thanks to this difference between Islam and other religions that in Islam nothing stands between God and man. In every other religion additions and interpolations have made it possible for the priesthood (or some other such group) to come between man and his Maker. Today, what is called 'organized' religion is actually just an adulterated form of religion. In this respect, Islam stands alone in not being an organised religion.

“You Were Sent to do Justice –”

Whenever Umer felt that his envoys had not behaved in a manner consistent with Islamic teachings, he would relieve them of their duties immediately, saying, “I did not authorize you to take the blood of Muslims; nor did I give you license to persecute them, assail their honour or appropriate that which rightly belongs to them. I appointed you to establish the ritual of prayer and distribute wealth and revenues among them. You were sent to do justice.” In fact, when Umer despatched his envoys, he would first make them promise not to ride on horseback, eat white bread or wear fine clothes. He would also make them swear never to close their door to the needy. His best advice to them was to remain as engrossed in the Quran as possible, and to ‘be careful in relating traditions of the Prophet lest some statement be attributed to him which he had not actually made. “And I am with you,” Umer would assure them.

Can Religion Be National?

At a recent international conference, a well-known Muslim leader, speaking, by his way to it, on behalf of the 900 million Muslims of the world, said: "As they enter the 15th Century Hijra, the Islamic peoples, who have rediscovered their pride in their religion, their great culture and their unique social and economic institutions, are confident that the advent of this century would mark the beginning of a new epoch, when their high ideals of peace, justice, equality of man, and their unique understanding of the universe, would once again enable them to make a worthy contribution to the betterment of mankind."

This resounding statement, far from attesting to Islamic ideals, betrays the overweening pride which Muslims take in their religion. It is this attitude, more than anything, which has caused Muslims to deviate from their true objective – worship of the Almighty – and concentrate instead on temporal supremacy. The Quran makes it clear that pride can lead only to worldliness (5:20) whereas a feeling of servitude, born of humility, engenders a proper sense of responsibility, pride, with its emphasis on egoism and selfishness, only distorts this virtue, thus rendering it ineffective.

A genuinely Islamic movement aims at warning man of the likelihood of being punished by God if he does not conform to the ideals of true religion. But the aim of present-day so-called Islamic movements would appear to be of a very materialistic nature. This has grown out of feelings of national superiority, which can never lead a nation or an individual along the path to eternal success. It is unfortunate that the supporters of such movements are quite unaware that they are adhering to a false set of ideals – pride, ego, nationalism, world supremacy. There is nothing even remotely Islamic about anyone of these concepts. The true religion of God calls upon man to centre his attention, not on temporal supremacy, but on the Hereafter. Responsibility, and not pride, is the virtue which will enable man to do so.

Dawah Activism

The Arabic weekly, *Al-Dawah*, which is published in Riyadh, has perhaps the highest circulation of any magazine of the Muslim world. I mention it because on September 12, it carried an article of considerable interest to Muslims entitled, "Shall We Leave Our Muslim Generations Who Inhabit the Western World to be Looted and Destroyed?" One very significant piece of information that it gives is that there are now about ten million Muslims settled in the West, who originally went there to study or to seek employment. The author, Dr. Abdul Qadir Tash, refers to these Muslims as "our messengers in the West" This, I think, is the most appropriate title for them, and is certainly the role in which they should cast themselves. They are not, as is sometimes imagined, poor, illiterate emigrants, but highly educated people from the best sections of the Muslim *Ummah*. As such, they are in a position to add a new chapter to Islam. But this will come about only when they realize their place in history, and actively undertake the great tasks to which they have been destined by their faith.

HIJRAH (EMIGRATION): A MATTER OF STRATEGY

Now, in connection with the whole question of emigration, let me just cite a *hadith* which has been handed down to posterity by Abu Hurayra, and recorded in the works of Bukhari, Muslim and Muwatta: "The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said that he had been asked to migrate to a settlement which would engulf all other places. People called it Yasrib, but it was Medina"

This *Hadith* highlights the importance of a principle of Islamic procedure known as *Hijrah*, which, in essence, means a change of position, whether in the purely physical sense of a change of location, or in the psychological sense of a change of stance. In either case, it is a deliberate strategy. An example of the former type is the Prophet's emigration from Mecca to Medina. An example of the latter type is his entering into the no-war pact of Hudaibiyyah with the Quraysh. *Hijrah*, therefore, is not simply random movement from place to place, or even a softening of attitudes, but a calculated step with a definite purpose. For instance, if at any given place, the opportunities for *dawah* work are overwhelmingly unfavourable, it is quite in order to leave it, and go in search of some other place where the conditions are more favourable. The Quran placing the matter in the context of God's bounty and human resourcefulness in availing of it, says, "Was not the earth of Allah spacious enough for you to find refuge therein?" Hell shall be their home: an evil fate. Unlike those are the helpless men, women, and children who have neither the strength nor the means to escape; Allah may pardon them: He is Pardoning, Forgiving (4:97-100).

The *seerah* of the Prophet explains his emigration to Medina and his entering into the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah in terms of the circumstances leading up to these events and the benefits resulting from the

Prophet's decision to take these steps. A stage had come in Mecca when there was so much opposition to the Prophet's propagation of Islam, that the best course of action was to go where conditions would be more propitious, i.e. to Medina. But once there, he was harried by one offensive after another launched by the enemies of Islam, and since none of these proved conclusive, it was difficult to assess whether truth would ever prevail over falsehood. Faced with endless warfare, in which no clear victory was in sight for either side, the Prophet decided to enter into a ten-year, no-war pact with his enemies. In this way, he was able to continue his battle against polytheism, but with the difference that matters would be settled in favour of monotheism, not in the field of armed conflict, but in the field of *dawah* activity. This change in the field of operation did, indeed, prove very effective, for in the course of the next two years, people accepted Islam in such great numbers that it no longer became necessary to prove the superiority of monotheism over polytheism. The sheer weight of numbers was sufficient to prove who was in the wrong and who was in the right

PRESENT-DAY CIRCUMSTANCES

In today's context, both forms of *Hijrah* have already taken place through God's instrumentality. Now the need of the hour is to grasp the full implications of these far-reaching developments and to avail of such opportunities as favour the propagation of Islam.

In modern times, thanks to a change of circumstances, two of these developments are decidedly in our favour. For the first time in history, the right to religious freedom has been internationally accepted, all nations having pledged themselves in the UN forum to non-interference in matters of religion. This important common pledge is on a parallel with the signing of the Peace Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which was, in fact, a highly strategic shift of ground. This treaty bound the militarily stronger party (the Quraish) to refraining, for a period of ten years, from interference in Muslim religious practices, such as the worship of God and the carrying out of *dawah* work. That is to say that the Quraish had to remain neutral in all religious matters pertaining to Muslims. This gave the Muslims a lengthy period in which to propagate Islam without any fear of their activities being disrupted.

Exactly similar circumstances have come into being in recent time in the wake of modern developments, e.g. the UN agreement according to which all nations of the world have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, thus binding themselves to non-interference in bonafide religious practices, or the propagation of religious beliefs. In this way, we have all the same opportunities for *dawah* as the Prophet and his companions had in the 6th century after the signing of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah at the opportune moment. I would even say that our advantages are the greater for having these opportunities open to us on a much vaster scale. If Muslims would only bestir themselves to avail of them, with a keen awareness of their true role, they could once again gain that 'clear victory' (Al-Fath-I) which they had in Mecca in those early days.

The other form *Hijrah*, that is, a physical movement from one place to another, has also taken place in modern times, but again, on a much more colossal scale. As the *Al-Dawah* journal points out, no less

than 10 million Muslims have emigrated to the western world. Whatever their various reasons for doing so their decision to move from their country of origin to the western world has made of the latter a kind of *Dar-al-Hijrah* (place of migration) for Muslims of the educated classes. In the words of the *hadith*, Muslims have again found a “Yathrib” which they can turn into a “Medina”. That is, they can once again convert a hotbed of atheism into a stronghold of Islam.

This facet of their individual and combined potential is very important, for the western countries, especially America offer a wide field for *dawah* activity. This whole area is just like the town which the Prophet said he had been commanded to turn into “a centre of *dawah* which would engulf all other towns.” There, exactly the same conditions have come into being as prevailed in Yathrib in early times. That is to say that among the people here (in America, as well as other western countries) there has arisen, for a variety of reasons, a new yearning for true religion. This burgeoning quest for truth, coupled with the most sophisticated modern technology for the dissemination of ideas, provides us with unparalleled opportunities for the widespread propagation of the divine message. It is of paramount importance that such opportunities be recognized and exploited to the full, for the acceptance of Islam by America – given the latter’s already established Position of universal leadership – could cause a host of other countries to follow it into the Islamic fold. This would be on an exact parallel with the situation in ancient Arabia after the fall of Mecca. At this juncture, the dominant tribe, the Quraish, accepted God’s message, and words of the *hadith*, that America had “engulfed” all other countries.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PROPHET

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, may peace be upon him, was born in Mecca in 570, and died in Medina in 632. He received the first revelation in 610, whereupon he presented himself before the world as the messenger of God.

The Prophet Muhammad’s message is intended for all mankind, from now until Doomsday. The eternal and universal prophethood of the Final Prophet is explained thus in the Quran:

“We have sent you forth to all mankind, so that you may give them good news and warn them, (34:28). There is a saying of the Prophet which is even more specific: “I have been sent to all blacks and whites” (*Tafsir ibn Kathir*, Vol. 3, p. 539). It is equally noteworthy that the Prophet’s message was meant for women as well as men. Laying emphasis on the equality of the sexes, the Quran says, “You are members of one another” (3:195).

DAWAH ACTIVISM

It is written in the Quran that “there is a good example in God’s Prophet for those who look to God and the Last Day and remember God always” (33:21). The life of the Prophet is, indeed, an example for us to follow in the most universal sense. On this occasion, however, I wish to lay stress on his role as *da’i*,

the *dawah* aspect of his life being the most important – the key, in fact, to his whole personality. The Quran makes his mission quite clear:

“O Prophet, We have sent you forth as a witness, a bearer of good news, and a warner, one who shall call (men and women) to God by His leave, and guide them like a shining light,” (33:45-46).

The real importance of the Prophet’s status lay in his being a messenger of God. This was the principal aim he kept in view in all of his activities, and, if he found it expedient to migrate, it was in order to hasten the processes of his *dawah* activity. It was this same sense of expediency which caused him to negotiate the Peace Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and which later made it possible for him to bring Arabia, and then a large part of the rest of the world, within the Islamic fold. What Sir Arthur Keith has said about Egypt is true also of other countries: “The Egyptians were conquered, not by the sword but by the Quran.”

The Prophet was commanded to begin his prophetic mission by appealing to people’s awareness and intellect. On this point, the Quran says, “You (i.e. Muhammad) that are wrapped up in your vestment, arise and give warning” (74:1-2). Again, on the subject of such an appeal, it is on record that once, when all the enemies of Islam had gathered at the house of the Prophet’s uncle, Abu Talib, in order to enquire what Muhammad wanted from them, the Prophet replied, “I only want a word from you. Give me this word and you will be the owners of both the Arab and the non-Arab world.” This clearly indicates that the approach adopted by the Prophet of Islam was that of *dawah* activism.

In the long history of the action taken by reformers, various methods of activism have come to light, some violent and some non-violent; this is true equally of the present day as of the past. The Prophet’s method, however, was always that of *dawah* activism, that is, making use of influence rather than force, swaying the heart rather than vanquishing the body, taking the guise not of rival and adversary, but of well-wisher and sympathizer, loving his rivals instead of hating them, loving to the extent that prayers simply poured out of his heart for the people.

A GOD-CENTRED LIFE

The message of the Prophet of Islam” to sum it up, is that of God-centred living. Man is of such a nature as to crave a focal point around which his life should revolve. No one is free of this compulsion. But, usually, people centre their attention on such worthless objective as material gain, political power, self-glorification, sexual enjoyment, etc. The Prophet, however held that the achievement of such goals is not the real answer to the satisfaction of man’s needs and urges; such things afford only temporary solace; they cannot give one a wholesome sense of fulfillment throughout the entire course of one’s life.

Man is limited in a variety of ways. That is why he makes worldly and not spiritual ambitions the permanent centre of his life. It is because of his limitations that he continues to pin false hopes on one or

more of these ephemeral goals. Sooner or later he begins, in consequence, to suffer from a feeling of severe frustration. His initial successes prove hollow and his life ends in futility.

The Prophet of Islam held that, for man, the only real and permanent centre of his existence was the Supreme Being – Almighty God. The Quran says: “Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of God, for without doubt, in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction” (13:28). At another point, the Quran puts these words in the mouth of the Prophet: “Therefore flee unto God, I am a manifest warner to you from him” (51:50).

Those who adopt God-centred living are beckoned by the Quran to a heavenly abode and given glad tidings: “O soul at peace, return to your Lord, joyful and well pleased. Join my servants and enter my Paradise” (89:27-30).

God, being man’s Creator and Sustainer, is the only valid object of man’s attention; as such he deserves to have man’s life built up around Him.

MAN CUT DOWN TO SIZE

According to the Prophet of Islam, man has been given his freedom in order that he may be put to the test. Man will pass this test only if, of his own free will, he can make himself subservient to his Maker. To illustrate this truth, *Sahih Muslim* has recorded a *hadith* passed on to him by Abu Masood Al Badari. It seems that one day Abu Masood was beating his slave when the Prophet happened to pass by. The Prophet said to him, “You should realize, Abu Masood, that God has more power over you than you have over this slave.” Abu Masood trembled so much on hearing the Prophet’s words that the whip fell from his hand.

It is clear from this incident that before the Prophet addressed these words to him, Abu Masood had thought of himself as the owner of the slave and, therefore, as his superior. But, on hearing what the Prophet had to say, he realized that this conception of his relationship with his slave was quite artificial, because all men are equal in the eyes of God. And there can be no one greater than God. What the Prophet did, in effect, was to remind him of this reality. This served as a warning to him. All of a sudden, a veil was removed from his eyes: his greatness was reduced to nothing, and he found himself on the same level of existence as his slave.

This incident shows us the kind of man the Prophet wanted to shape, i.e. a man cut down to size, a man completely free of all artificial feelings of disparity and superiority. There are various ways of describing a believer but the most precise definition must always include the idea of being shorn of all illusions of grandeur. It is only a man who has been cut down to size who can see life with perfect objectivity. It is only such a man who can acknowledge the truth, without jealousy or arrogance proving an obstacle. Free of such complexes, he will go through life doing as he ought and refraining from wrongdoing.

PRESERVING THE MUSLIM IDENTITY

An acute problem facing the Muslims living in America and other western countries is that of preserving their Islamic identity. From one generation to the next, the influence of the atheistic civilization of the west becomes increasingly potent. The present generation are at a complete loss as to how to save themselves from this cultural onslaught. But the solution to this problem lies neither in complaining against it, nor in returning to their countries of origin and leaving the western world behind them.

They must stay where they are counter the erosion of their identity with *dawah*. That is sole valid solution to this problem. The unwilling *da'i* will soon find himself relegated to the position of the *mad'u* (member of a congregation, a simple recipient of the ideas and culture of others) and that is surely too high a price to pay for the purely material advantages of the west.

If Muslims living in the west can be made aware of how damaging their negligence has been, and can be persuaded once again to make their lives *dawah-oriented*, they should be able not only to play a great role in the history of Islam, but also to reconstruct the glory of their lost identity.

THE PRINCIPLE OF A VOIDANCE

Another very important *dawah* principle in Islam is that of avoidance. The Quran commands us to “keep to forgiveness, and enjoin justice, and avoid the ignorant” (7:199).

In the books of Sahih Bukhari and other books of Hadith, an event has been recorded which illustrates this principle. It seems that while the Prophet was sitting with his companions in the mosque at Medina, an illiterate, uncouth villager entered the mosque and began to urinate. Enraged at such sacrilegious behaviour inside the mosque, the Prophet's companions wanted to punish the man. But the Prophet stopped them from doing so, saying, “Leave him alone. Wash the place with water. You have been sent to make things easy for people, not to make them more difficult” This was surely a supreme example of restraint.

Avoidance, or the exercise of restraint, would appear to be just another name for doing nothing, taking no action. But the fact is, avoidance in itself is a great and positive act. By exercising self-control, one makes the other man come face to face with his own conscience. The result of the Prophet refusing to take action against the ignorant villager was that the latter felt ashamed of his mistake, and told such stories of his own shortcomings and Muhammad's magnanimity when he went back to his village that his whole tribe finally converted to Islam.

Becoming a *da'i* means becoming a man with a sense of purpose. For a purposeful man, the principle of avoidance is an absolute necessity. This means that in advancing towards our objective, we must avoid all irrelevancies. This is a great piece of wisdom without which worthy objectives can never be attained, and without which no man can ever become a true *da'i* of God.

GRADUALNESS

Reform, when carried out in the truly prophetic manner, is achieved gradually, in easy stages, whether it is aimed at individuals or at groups. In this way, there is no risk – at any point of its becoming unpalatable to uninformed or recalcitrant minds. If the way is to be paved towards successful reform, there are two principles which are worth bearing in mind. One is that before even attempting to root out evil practices, efforts should first be made to influence the minds of the wrongdoers. This prophetic method is well illustrated by one particular tradition of the Prophet which was narrated by his wife, Aisha, and subsequently recorded by a Sahih Bukhari. By her account, the Meccan verses in the Quran, which mention heaven and hell, were the first to be revealed, and it was not until people's hearts had softened towards Islam, that God's commandments on what exactly was lawful and what was unlawful were conveyed to people.

The verses which gave warnings of hell and glad tidings of heaven caused people to be so predisposed in favour of Islam that when the Quran later laid down guidelines for what should and what should not be done, they had no compunction about following them. The first principle, therefore, of prophetic gradualism is to ring the changes at the mental level before trying to achieve anything on a grander scale. Only when people's minds have been suitably influenced should commandments, such as those banning drinking, be communicated to them.

Even after an intellectual revolution, when the time is ripe for a more far-reaching type of revolution, the prophetic method does not favour a sudden and total change of the status quo. Change at this point must still be gradual.

At this second stage, as at the first, targets must be set which are relatively easy for the addressee to accept. The changes mooted should be such as he is already willing to undertake. Only at a later stage, after making all due concessions to circumstances should steps be taken to effect more radical changes. The Prophet's life abounds in examples of this unhurried and gradual approach. One very good illustration of it was his treatment of a group of six non-Muslims who came to Medina from the city of Taif in 9 A.H. In the course of their conversation, which has been recorded in detail in books of *Hadith*, this group professed their willingness to accept Islam, but with two reservation: firstly, that they would not be required to pay *zakat* and secondly, that they would not engage in *jihad*. Now, *zakat* and *jihad* are inescapable obligations for Islamic devotees, yet the Prophet accepted the conditions laid down by these men from Taif, and admitted them into the fold of Islam. When others of the Islamic faith questioned his acceptance of such conditions, he set their fears at rest by saying that once they had converted to Islam, they would, in time, begin to pay *zakat* and engage in *jihad*, thus fulfilling their sacred responsibilities.

A study of the Prophet's life shows that gradualism is a necessity, without which a revolution on the prophetic pattern can never be achieved.

TO PRAY IS TO TAKE ACTION

Prayer is a positive action. The Prophet often had recourse to prayer in situations which would have driven lesser men to negative reaction. According to Ibn Ishaq, such a situation arose during the Meccan period when a recent convert, Tufail ibn Amr Al Dausi, went back to his tribe, the Daus, to call them to Islam, only to meet with attitudes of haughtiness and defiance. Tufail ibn Amr then came back to the Prophet and asked him to curse the tribesmen for their intransigence. The Prophet, on the contrary, raised his hand and started praying for them in these words: "O God, guide the Daus tribe along the right path, O God, guide the Daus tribe." Then he said to Tufail ibn Amr, "Now go back to your tribe and call them to the faith again, and deal with them kindly." (*Sirat ibn Hisham*. Vol. I, p. 409)

To offer up such a prayer and to give such advice were not the simplest of matters. To do so, the Prophet had to convert a negative attitude into a positive one. He had to turn his feelings of disgust into well-wishing and love. Where Tufail ibn Amr had looked only to the present, the Prophet looked to the future and made him see the situation from this point of view.

Du'a (the invocation of blessings) is, in one respect, a request for something from God. In another respect, it is the correct formation of one's own psychology. It brings about, within one, an awakening of spiritual power. When Tufail ibn Amr, returned to his tribe with this new psychology, it was as if he himself had become a different human being, and was, therefore, able to be far more effective in calling his tribesmen to the true faith. The result, as might be expected, was that the whole tribe converted to Islam.

In a society whose members become one another's well-wishers – to the point of praying for one another – a positive psychology will definitely flourish. There is no greater necessity for a healthy society than that of mutual regard and esteem.

A UNIQUE ADVANTAGE

Dr. Nishi Kant Chattopadhyay, who was born in the second half of the 19th century, was a highly educated Hindu with a profound urge to seek the truth. In his quest for knowledge, he began to make a study of the world's religions. But he found no satisfaction in his studies for the simple reason that none of these religions bore the stamp of historical authenticity. It was only when he took up the study of Islam that he felt he was dealing with verifiable historical facts. As he put it, in his book, *Why I Have Accepted Islam* (1904), "Oh what a relief to find, after all, a truly historical prophet to believe in" (p.10).

The birth and growth of Islam are established facts which have been recorded in the greatest detail in the annals of history. Its credibility, therefore, has never been in question. This is what gives Islam a special, inner power which causes it to grow, and accounts for its spread throughout the centuries even in the absence of any systematized or enforced propagation.

In modern times, however, an artificial obstacle has been placed in the way of its further expansion, namely, the agitational politics engaged in by Muslims under the banner of Islam. Wars have been waged and violence has been practised in the name of Islam with the result that Islam has come to be bracketed along with terrorism.

Modern man is weary of war and all the violence which it entails. He is desperately searching for peace. Is it possible then that he could turn to Islam when its very name evokes a picture of the horrors of war? It is hardly surprising that modern man has been turned away from true religion. If Islam is to continue to spread in the way it did in the past, its image must be so refurbished that no shred of suspicion is attached to its name. The only way in which this can be achieved is for Muslims to give up all forms of agitation and violence. It should also be the duty of those Muslims who are not themselves actively involved in such negative activity to condemn and dissuade those who are. They should publicly brand all such actions as un-Islamic, so that people's hearts may once more be opened to Islam.

DAWAH CENTRE

One of the commandments of the Quran is as follows:

'And if anyone of the idolaters seeks asylum with you, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of God. And then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know' (9:6).

This shows that it is God's will that there should be *Dawah* Centres in Muslim localities where the unenlightened may safely stay. In practice, this means accommodating them and providing them with every facility for the study of Islam. It means making books available to them in different languages, and giving them every opportunity to meet Muslims so that they may have fruitful discussions on the subject of Islam. This is one of the most effective ways of bringing the word of God to mankind.

In modern times, Islamic Centres have been set up all over the world, and especially in western countries. There is no town worth the name which does not have such a centre. This ought to provide a solid infrastructure for *dawah* activity, but in most cases these centres function only as "Islamic Community Centres." Muslims should realize that this development is too inward-looking and should make efforts to make their centres the pivot of outward-looking *dawah*-work. It is only a question of having true zeal for such work, and these centres can be effectively transformed.

TRAINING COURSE

As well as being centres of *dawah* activity, the existing centres can fulfill the important role of providing a training ground for *dawah* workers. As the Quran puts it, "It is not right that all the believers should go at once. But why should not a party of every section of them go forth, to become learned in religion and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may take heed" (9: 122).

It should be quite feasible for Muslims in all localities to visit these centres in small groups at pre-arranged times and for fixed periods to receive regular training in *dawah*-work. Then when they return to their homes, or indeed, wherever they live, they will be able to function as true *du'at*.

DAWAH LITERATURE

It is said in the Quran that God has taught us through the pen (96:4). This means that in the propagation of religion, the pen – or, in other words, literature – is of fundamental importance. It has, indeed, been found in the past that books have played an important role in the work of *dawah*. In modern times, the effectiveness of this role has been increased many times over by the invention of the printing press. This has permitted the centres of *dawah* activity to remain static, while their influence reaches out far and wide.

With regard to the type of literature which is employed, the Quran specifies that it should be in the language and style of the community to which it is addressed. "And we have sent no Messenger but in the language of his own people, in order to make things clear to them." (Quran, 14:4).

There is now in existence a considerable body of literature, either in the original or in translation, which is suitable for *dawah* work. What appears to be lacking is the will to put it to good use.

One very important guideline must be kept in view when using literature for *dawah* work, and that is to avoid texts which present Islam in a political light. Modern man is in no need of a political system. What he craves is a faith which will not only provide him with a dependable moral code, but which will bring peace to his soul. The basic literature which we should use in *dawah*-work should consist of translations of the Quran and the *Hadith*, after which we may add texts in a more contemporary style to suit the modern mind. The best literature is that which presents Islam as a spiritual matter and not as a political system.

DAWAH FUND

It has to be conceded that not all Muslims can involve themselves directly in *dawah* work. It is not everyone who has the capacity or the leisure to do so. However, it is quite possible for everyone to have some indirect involvement.

By indirect involvement, I mean that everyone should decide to donate a part of his income to the *dawah* fund. If all Muslims are agreeable to indirect participation of this kind, several benefits will ensue. One will be that everyone will have a keen sense of involvement in a noble cause. Another will be that this steady financial backing will ensure no disruption in the work. Perhaps the greatest benefit will be the strengthening of the community spirit among Muslims. It will be felt that *dawah* work is not in the hands of just a few individuals but is the responsibility of the entire community. Such united efforts are certain to receive the blessings which it is God's will to shower upon them.

LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

The *dawah* feat performed by the Prophet of Islam has been acknowledged by all historians. Certain aspects of his achievements have been given greater or less importance according to the predispositions of different writers, but here I shall quote only the words of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) taken from the second lecture in his book, *Heroes and Hero Worship*. On the subject of "The Hero as a Prophet," he writes, "To the Arab nation it was as a birth from darkness into light; Arabia first became alive by means of it A poor shepherd people, roaming unnoticed in its deserts since the creation of the world: a Hero-Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe: see, the unnoticed becomes world-notable, the small has grown world-great; within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Grenada on this hand, at Delhi on that; – glancing in valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world. Belief is great, life-giving. The history of a Nation becomes fruitful, soul-elevating, great, so soon as it believes. These Arabs, the man Mahomet, and that one century, – is it not as if a spark had fallen, one spark, on a world of what seemed black, unnoticeable sand; but lo! the sand proves explosive powder, blazes heaven high from Delhi to Grenada! I said, the Great Man was always as lightning out of Heaven; the rest of men waited for him like fuel, and then they too would flame" (p. 103). Carlyle sees the bringing of the light of divine guidance to the world as the action of a "hero". But the Quran stresses, not his being a great hero, but the excellence of the personal example he set: "Assuredly there has been an excellent example for you in the messenger of God" (33:21).

Let us follow this excellent example of the Prophet of God, and raise ourselves and our community on the strength of it. Let us once again stand before the world as the conveyors of God's message, so that the world may once again be bathed in the divine light of its Creator. May the Almighty bless us in this divine mission.

"And that is no great matter for God." (Quran, 14:20).

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